

Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes January 17-18, 2007

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

January 17-18, 2007

Disability Determination Conference Room

Helena, MT

Members present: David Boyd, Dan Burke, Jackie Colombe, Faith Dawson, Andrea Falcon, Dalayna Faught, Don Jones, Ron Mills, Wayne Nankivel, Ruth Straley, Dick Trerise, Claudette Vance, Michelle Williamson, Mavis Young Bear

Members absent: Denise Corrao, Maureen Kenneally, Sharla LaFountain, Carol Lambert, Christina Mattlin, Dennis Moore, Paul Pearson

Staff and guests present: Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Bob Jahner, Barb Varnum, Beverly Berg, Brigitte Winfield, Scott Williamson, Reg Gibbs (Thursday)

Wednesday, January 17

Dick called the meeting to order at 10:00, and members introduced themselves. Dick welcomed new members Andrea Falcon and Mavis Young Bear.

The Council approved the minutes from the October meeting.

No public comment was made.

Review of VR Statistics, Legislature, and Strategic Plan

Peggy passed out guidance from the Governor's office on what councils could and could not do. Council members can testify in front of the Legislature on their own behalf, but not on behalf of the Council unless the Governor has given his specific approval.

Peggy reviewed the VR "Stats at a Glance" showing that last year 909 Montanans with disabilities got jobs. Their total annual earnings were \$13.4 million, and their average hourly wage was \$9.74. About 48% of the people served in 2006 had a mental disability (cognitive, metal illness, learning disability) as compared to 20 years ago when only 19% of the people served having a mental disability. Last year 43% of the people served had a physical disability (orthopedic or other physical disability) as compared to 20 years ago when 69% of the people had some type of physical disability. The remaining people served had a sensory disability (hearing, visual).

Peggy also handed out a list of the disability-related bills the Legislature is considering. Some of these include requiring insurance plans to cover hearing aids, testing for newborn hearing, expanding services for deaf children in schools, prohibiting prerelease prisoners from working with people with disabilities, revising blind vendor laws, and funding brain injury programs.

Peggy discussed the strategic plan update which shows the activities that have been accomplished since the last meeting. VR regional offices have prepared Powerpoint presentations and purchased banners and tablecloths for setting up displays. Each office will have access to these materials. In addition many activities have occurred relating to agency collaboration. Mental health staff have made presentations to VR staff and VR staff have made presentations to mental health staff.

Committee meetings

The committees met to review the results of the October planning meeting and to work on goals for this year. The minutes are attached.

State and federal activities

Joe Mathews talked about the legislative appropriation process. This year things are a little different—there is a template for each program to follow, and the committee does not want the programs to deviate from this formal template when describing their activities. They are also looking for measurable goals, and VR is lucky because the federal government has standards and indicators that states must meet.

This year not only is the VR program fully matched federally but also any new funding the program requests must be all state funds because there are no more federal funds. One thing the VR program is asking for is a transition counselor—a counselor to serve students transitioning from school to work.

On the federal scene, Congress will likely reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act and the Rehabilitation Act this year. The Rehabilitation Act is part of the Workforce Investment Act.

Joe has attended two national meetings on the future of VR. This group is looking at a number of issues such as:

- Should VR be a 'job service' and get people jobs quickly or should VR be more comprehensive?
- Should VR eliminate the 'time-limited' concept and offer services indefinitely?
- Should some VR services be capped (limit how much you can spend on something like self employment)?
- Should VR serve only those on Social Security?
- Should VR serve only people who are transition age ('school to work')?
- Should all states be on 'order of selection'?
- Should VR help people with only their first job or should it maximize employment?
- How should VR track 'results'?

Dick mentioned that the Special Education reauthorization may carry over. Schools must now track students after high school. Also they must track by different populations such as race, gender, etc. This may be coming with the VR reauthorization.

Blind and Low Vision update

Beverly Berg stated that the Blind and Low Vision staff has two vacancies—a counselor in Great Falls and an orientation and mobility specialist in Butte. The program was fully staffed for four months. The last Legislature gave the program a new position—assistive technology specialist—and that person has been working with consumers and employers.

The older blind program within Blind and Low Vision Services exceeded the goals for number of people served. The program has had to restrict eligibility in order to serve people who are more severely disabled. The administrative rules that Bev discussed at the last meeting have been published.

The Business Enterprise Program recently had an audit performed to see how the program could be improved; the items identified in the audit relating to accounting and business practices have been addressed. The vending route in Billings has been restarted, and it now includes the post office. There is a bill in the Legislature to expand vending service to the state highways.

Field services update

Bob Jahner talked about VR case services. VR has a \$9 million benefits budget which is used to purchase services for consumers. This year, so far, VR seems to be holding its own. The new case management system, CASE-E, was sent out this week for testing. This system allows case managers to directly enter data. VR already has a sophisticated data collection and financial system. This new system streamlines a counselor's work. VR has had trouble making the system accessible to staff who are blind.

January 31 will be the rule hearing to change the length of time that VR can take to develop a plan for a consumer. This proposed administrative rule has been discussed by the Council in the past. VR has also discussed with the Council a new rule to limit certain services, and this proposed rule is still being drafted.

In the area of fair hearings, VR is currently dealing with two: (1) a consumer with a significant mental illness and an orthopedic disability does not want the mental illness to be addressed; and (2) a consumer who wants VR to pay for school services that were not pre-authorized. Both hearings have been held, and VR is waiting for the results.

Bob also discussed the new Field Services Statewide Plan which discusses specific goals for each of the regional offices. The plan talks about public relations, focus groups, pockets of expertise, and peer consultation.

Thursday, January 18

Council members attended the VR public hearing of the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services. This committee, composed of both senators and representatives, is the first step for the Legislature in appropriating the budget for Vocational Rehabilitation. Over 20 people testified for the VR program, including Faith Dawson, Michelle Williamson, Jackie Colombe, and Dan Burke.

Extended Employment

Barb Varnum introduced Reg Gibbs, the private contractor who administers the extended employment program, and Reg explained the program. Extended employment provides services to very severely disabled people who cannot hold a "regular" job. Services include job coaching in either a community job or work in a sheltered workshop, and the services last indefinitely (as opposed to VR's time-limited services). This program is funded totally with state funds. There are 17 service providers across the state, and about 260 people receive services. In addition, 163 people are on a waiting list for services. The budget for extended employment is just over a million dollars a year. The Montana Association for Rehabilitation is asking the Legislature for funding to serve 50 more people.

Other VR programs

Barb mentioned the public hearing for VR and Independent Living will be March 28. She also talked about some of her activities relating to Native Americans—she visited the Northern Cheyenne reservation and did case reviews with Quintin Kingfisher (the director); she has been doing benefits presentations on reservations; she will attend Consortium of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) next month; and two staff will attend state training on Native American issues.

Barb sent out the Governor's report earlier this month.

Barb also reported that in the area of consumer satisfaction surveys, the routine closure letter will now include an attachment stating that the survey will be coming and asking consumers to complete it when it comes.

Dick mentioned that the Conference for Exceptional Children will be held in Missoula the first week of April.

Election of officers

Dick Trerise was elected chair of the Council for 2007, and Ruth Straley was elected vice-chair of the Council.

Meeting dates for 2007

April 12-13 in Helena

July 12-13 in Helena

Fall on a reservation (hopefully)

Agenda items for next meeting

Transition panel

Information from PLUK (Parents Let's Unite for Kids)

Display of Public Relations Materials

Report on Legislature

View VR website

Appendix A

Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Native American Committee—1/17/2007

Members: David Boyd (chair), Michelle Williamson, Barbara Varnum, Jackie Colombe, Ron Mills

This committee agreed that the Native American committee should meet during a separate time frame than that of the Transition & Public Relations committees. Members of the NA committee have expressed a desire to sit on one of the other committees, as it is felt that these committees would be beneficial for Native American issues as well. Everyone agreed that the NA committee will meet prior to the start of the MVR Council, or possibly during the lunch hour.

The Native American committee met all of their goals from the previous year.

Continuing & new goals are as follows:

1) Designate one Council meeting to be held on a Montana reservation. The Blackfeet Tribal VR volunteered to host a meeting in 2006 (contingent on their Project Director's approval). *Barbara Varnum did email Cheryl Wells, Blackfeet Tribal VR Counselor, regarding the possibility of holding our summer or fall meeting on their reservation. She has yet to hear back from the project. Barbara will again contact this program.*

2) Contact the Crow Agency to discuss the possibility of them applying for the 121 grant. *Barbara Varnum was going to meet with personnel of Tribal Health & Human Services from the Crow reservation on 1/11/07. This meeting was canceled. Barbara will be a presenter at the Crow Tribe Federal Benefits Workshop II on March 20 & 21, at which time she will discuss the Tribal 121 programs. Barbara did hear "through the grapevine" that the Crow reservation is in the process of writing a proposal for the 121 grant. She will verify if this is in fact happening.*

3) Actively pursue excellent attendance by all of the 121s at the next Council meeting that is held on a reservation. *All 121s will be notified by Barbara Varnum of the next Council meeting that is held on a reservation. The Council meeting that was held on the Fort Belknap reservation in July 2006 was attended by all of Montana's Tribal 121 programs.*

4) Encourage participation by Native Americans at the 2007 MYLF (Montana Youth Leadership Forum). *The committee today changed this goal to read: **The committee will request information from the MYLF Director, June Hermanson, of her outreach efforts to the seven MT reservations.** Barbara Varnum will contact June and request this information prior to our next MVR Council meeting.*

5) Ensure that all VR Counselors that serve the Reservations participate in some type of cultural sensitivity training that is specific to the reservation that they serve. *Two MVR counselors that serve the Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, and Fort Peck reservations will be attending the “Building Effective Government and Business Relations with American Indian Tribes” workshop in January 2007. This conference will include “Conversations with Tribal Representatives” which will enable these counselors to learn about issues that are specific to the reservations that they serve.*

When the MVR Council holds a meeting on a reservation, the counselors that serve that reservation will be invited to the Council meeting.

Doug Robinson, MVR Blind & Low Vision Counselor, will be attending the CANAR conference in Washington DC, in February. Barbara Varnum will be attending this conference as well.

6) Encourage the members on the Native American committee to attend the annual Native American Traumatic Brain Injury Conference. *The conference is typically held in the spring, and members will be encouraged to attend this conference.*

7) Provide information regarding Vocational Rehabilitation to the Native American Alliance: *Jackie will contact the Native American Alliance program.*

Appendix A

Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Transitions Committee—1/17/2007

Plans for 2007

- Ask Peggy Williams to invite Ellen Swaney to participate in a panel discussion before the full Council. Other panel participants would be OPI and VR. Topics for discussion would include, but not be limited to: standardization of eligibility requirements for disability support services within Higher Education; OPI's Performance Summary; update on Reauthorization of the Act (if available); and overview of the interagency agreement Joe Mathews has negotiated with Higher Education.
- We continue to support MYLF and encourage one VR Counselor from each Region to attend (also, Blind and Low Vision Services staff as needed).
- Reconnect and strengthen the existing connections with PLUK. Ask Peggy Williams to approach PLUK regarding representation on the Council. Ask PLUK to provide an overview of their services to the full Council.
- Create an array of methods, through professional development of VR Counselors, to help them more effectively relate VR services to the IEP process (again, Reauthorization of the Act will likely affect any training). Consider joint training with partners such as PLUK, OPI, Higher Education, WROCC (Mary Morrison), etc...
- Build and maintain a "Hot Page" of disability related links. Faith Dawson will do some preliminary work on this. Marvalee Christofferson in the VR Central Office will be approached regarding the feasibility of VR hosting such a page.
- Discuss the feasibility of developing a "mentor" or "peer" list of persons with disabilities performing in specific occupations. We recognize the value. Are there liability issues? If we proceed with this, it may be a project for VR's Futures group.

Appendix A

Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Public Relations Committee—1/17/2007

All 2006 goals were met.

Ongoing goals include:

- Stats at a Glance
- Governor's Report
- Friends of Rehab mailings
- Brochures distributed to medical offices

Peggy has put together a draft Talking Point Paper to focus discussion on important VR issues.

We suggest that VR include Denise's video as part of VR materials in the Public Relations tool kit.

We suggest that VR look for opportunities with service organizations to increase awareness of VR.

We suggest that VR continue to provide information on CAP to consumers.